

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 5931

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PBOR, GT, UK, BH

SUBJ: BELIZE: CONVERSATION WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE LUCAS

SUMMARY. AT LUNCHEON OCTOBER 24 MINISTER OF DEFENSE LUCAS TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT ASSEMBLAGE OF HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS FOR GRADUATION CEREMONIES AT LA POLVORA ARMY RANGER SCHOOL NEAR BELIZE HAD SPURRED RUMORS IN BELIZE OF GOG TROOPS CONCENTRATIONS ON BORDER. LUCAS INVITED AMBASSADOR TO VISIT SCHOOL AND ADDED THAT HE HAD EXTENDED SIMILAR INVITATION TO BELIZE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS BUT THEY HAD DECLINED. TO AMBASSADOR'S SUGGESTION LUCAS CONSIDER INVITING UK MILITARY COMMANDER TO SEE ACTUAL SITUATION, LUCAS REPLIED HE MIGHT INVITE GOVERNOR. LUCAS MAINTAINED UK REINFORCEMENTS WERE CONTINUING IN BELIZE. GENERAL STATED WHOLE BELIZE CRISIS WAS POLITICAL MANEUVER BY PRICE TO ENSURE HIS PARTY'S ELECTORAL TRIUMPH. LUCAS CLAIMED AGAIN GOG WAS UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM PRESS ON BELIZE. END SUMMARY.

1. AMBASSADOR TALKED WITH MINDEF GENERAL LUCAS AT LUNCH OCTOBER 24. LUCAS ASKED AMBASSADOR IF
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HE KNEW THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF GUATEMALAN

TROOPS AT LA POLVERA NEAR THE BELIZE FRONTIER.
WHEN AMBASSADOR LOOKED SURPRISED, LUCAS LAUGHED
AND SAID BOTH HE AND THE AMBASSADOR KNEW THERE
WERE NO SUCH FORCES AT LA POLVERA BUT THE BELIZEANS
THOUGHTSO.

2. DEFMIN EXPLAINED TO AMBASSADOR, AS HE PRESIDENT
LAUGERUD EARLIER, THAT GUATEMALAN ARMY RANGER
SCHOOL IS LOCATED AT LA POLVERA. EVERY THREE MONTHS
AT END OF COURSE HIGH-RANKING GUATEMALAN MILITARY
OFFICERS ASSEMBLE FOR GRADUATION CEREMONIES.
THIS HAS LED TO RUMORS IN BELIZE OF GUATEMALAN
MILITARY ACTIVITY AND CONCENTRATION IN LA POLVERA.
GENERAL LUCAS SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO INVITE AMBASSADOR
IN NEAR FUTURE TO FLY WITH HIM TO LA POLVERA TO SEE
FOR HIMSELF THE ACTUAL SITUATION. AMBASSADOR
GAVE NON-COMMITTAL RESPONSE. LUCAS SAID THROUGH
GUATEMALAN COUNSUL GENERAL IN BELIZE INVITATION HAD
BEEN EXTENDED TO BELIZEAN GOVERNMENT LEADERS
TO VISIT LA POLVERA BUT PRIME MINISTER PRICE HAD
REFUSED TO ALLOW THEM TO GO SAYING HE WOULD BE
ACCUSED OF SEELING OUT TO THE GUATEMALANS OR
CONSPIRING WITH THEM. LUCAS WAS THEREFORE
THINKING OF INVITING BELIZEAN OPPOSITION LEADERS.
AMBASSADOR LAUGHED AND SAID THIS WOULD CERTAINLY
PUT DEFMIN IN THE MIDST OF BELIZEAN INTERNAL
POLITICS. WHY DID THE DEFMIN NOT INVITE THE BRITISH
MILITARY COMMANDER TO VISIT LA POLVERA SINCE THE
BRITISH HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEFENSE OF
BELIZE AND MUST RESPOND TO BELIZEAN PRESSURES
FOR PROTECTION AGAINST ALLEGED GUATEMALAN TROOP
BUILD-UPS? LUCAS RESPONDED IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA
TO HAVE THE GUATEMALAN CONSUL GUENERAL INVITE THE
BRITISH GOVERNOR IN BELIZE TO COME TO LA POLVERA.
LUCAS WENT ON TO SPEAK HIGHLY OF THE GOVERNOR AS
AS REASONABLE, STABLE INDIVIDUAL OF GREAT INFLUENCE.

3. GENERAL LUCAS THEN PROCEEDED TO RECOUNT TO
AMBASSADOR HIS OWN VERSION OF CONTINUING BRITISH
MILITARY REINFORCEMENTS IN BELIZE SAYING THERE
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HAD BEEN ADDITIONAL FLIGHTS OF C-130'S, THAT PUMA
HELICOPTERS WERE IN FACT ARMED AND THAT ADDITIONAL
ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS HAD BEEN INTRODUCED. ALSO
BRITISH FRIGATE WAS MUCH CLOSER TO BELIZE COAST
THAN HAD BEEN ORIGINALLY REPORTED. AMBASSADOR
ATTEMPTED TO CORRECT THE DEFMIN'S ERRONEOUS
IMPRESSION. THE MINISTER LOOKED SO OBVIOUSLY DOUBTFUL
THAT THE AMBASSADOR LAUGHED AND SAID "YOU DON'T

BELIEVE ME*" "NO," SAID LUCAS, "BUT THEN THE
BELIZEANS DON'T BELIEVE WHAT WE SAY ABOUT LA
POLVERA EITHER."

4. IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR'S QUESTION, GENERAL
LUCAS SAID HE FELT THE WHOLE BELIZEAN CRISIS HAD
BEEN GENERATED BY PRIME MINISTER PRICE AS A FORM
OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE TO ENSURE THE TRIUMPH
OF HIS PARTY IN THE FORTHCOMING BELIZE ELECTIONS.
IN SPITE OF HIS EFFORTS, HOWEVER, PRICE WAS SURE
TO LOSE. OF ALL THE ELECTORAL CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS
IN BELIZE, GENERAL LUCAS WAS SURE PRICE'S PARTY
WOULD WIN ONLY TWO. THAT SHOULD BE HELPFUL,
SAID THE AMBASSADOR, FOR IN THAT CASE ALL YOU HAVE
TO DO IS REMAIN CALM AND THEN NEGOTIATE WITH
ANOTHER GOVERNMENT. THE DEFMIN LOOKED RATHER
SOUR AND SAID THE GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT IS UNDER
GREAT PUBLIC PRESSURE AND ESPECIALLY PRESSURE
FROM THE PRESS TO "DO SOMETHING" REGARDING BELIZE.
THE PRESS WAS DEMANDING TO KNOW WHAT THE ROLE
OF THE ARMED FORCES WAS IN LIGHT OF THE PROVOCATIONS
FROM BELIZE. THE AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED THAT THE
ANSWER WAS SIMPLE. THE ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES
WAS TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC CALM, STABILITY AND ORDER
IN THE FACE OF IRRESPONSIBLE PRESS AGITATION.
GENERAL LUCAS APPEARED MIFFED.

5. COMMENT: IN THE EVENT GENERAL LUCAS FOLLOWS
THROUGH ON HIS INVITATION TO VISIT LA POLVERA, THE
AMBASSADOR WILL PLEAD PRESSURE OF BUSINESS BUT
OFFER TO SEND HIS DEFENSE ATTACHE. IT MIGHT BE
WORTHWHILE, AGAIN SHOULD A GUATEMALAN INVITATION
BE FORTHCOMING, FOR A BRITISH REPRESENTATIVE TO
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VISIT LA POLVERA AS WELL, PERHAPS AT THE SAME TIME.
MELOY

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